



Review of DAVID HUME. *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition*. Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp.

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Hume Studies Volume XXVIX, Number 1 (April, 2003) 143-149.

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Book Reviews

DAVID HUME. *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition*. Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. Pp. cvii + 344. ISBN 0-19-825060-6 cloth, \$75.00; ISBN 0-19-926634-4, paper, \$35.00. (The paper version is scheduled for release in January 2004).

DAVID HUME. *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford Philosophical Texts). Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. v + 296. ISBN 0-19-875248-2, paper, \$12.95.

Here we have a new edition of Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, one that will become essential for scholars alongside the new Norton and Norton edition of Hume's *Treatise*.¹ L. A. Selby-Bigge's nineteenth century edition (supplemented by P. Nidditch's emendations) provided a good text to nineteenth century standards—good enough for it to become the standard for many years. But times change, and we now, quite reasonably, ask for more. Beauchamp's new edition provides a text and apparatus that is a vast improvement; it will surely replace Selby-Bigge's as the common reference text for scholars and students. To be sure, scholars at least will not for many years be able to do without the latter's edition: so many Hume studies have come out over the years with the references to the pages of this edition, that we will still have to refer to the older edition. But students have a new and very useful edition.

The critical edition for scholars provides for the first time a complete apparatus. Beauchamp has provided us with a complete history of the publication of the first *Enquiry*, including all the variants that occurred as Hume progressively modified the text. We have for first time laid out completely the material from the *Treatise* that Hume appropriated for his revised presentation of his philosophy. This will provide a good basis for all future discussion of the extent to which Hume revised his views between the earlier and the later work. Equally, the history of the text and its variants will provide a secure basis for future discussions of how and for what reasons Hume modified the text of the *Enquiry* as he produced new editions. Beauchamp has fully annotated all Hume's references and allusions, and has recorded various cross references and correspondences in the text. There is a complete list of the people and texts to which Hume made reference, together with a brief biographical note. There is a glossary of terms that might be puzzling, and besides the editor's thorough index to both Hume and the editorial material there is also reproduced Hume's own index.

Throughout the paragraphs of Hume's text have been numbered. This will make reference back to the Selby-Bigge edition somewhat easier than it otherwise would be.

The student's edition contains the same Humean text, but with much of the textual apparatus removed. What we have in its place is a slightly different set of annotations, together with a summary commentary for each section. I have used this text in an undergraduate seminar, and I have found these editorial comments extremely useful to both student and teacher. To the student, there is the glossary and references to persons cited. The brief commentaries and the detailed notes are very useful to the student, both for outlining the argument and covering material that one could never cover in detail in an undergraduate seminar. The outlines of the arguments are useful to the instructor, letting him or her deal with the more complicated issues and arguments, avoiding the usual need for *explication de texte*. The text itself is easy to read, and the numbering of the paragraphs makes references particularly easy.

There have of course been lost things that one previously had found useful. The most significant of these, I think, has been Selby-Bigge's systematic comparison of the text of the *Enquiries* with that of the *Treatise*. Hume's own judgment that the *Enquiries* were in literary terms the better text is perhaps correct. But posterity has on the whole seemed to accept that the *Treatise* is the better work philosophically. Selby-Bigge supplied an Introduction that made a systematic comparison of the two texts. Unless one is prepared to make such a systematic comparison oneself—which is something that everyone ought

eventually to try on one's own, but is an unreasonable task for even graduate students—unless one is prepared to make that comparison on one's own, then one will have to go back to the Selby-Bigge edition of the *Enquiries*. To be sure, in the student edition, the editor's notes to each section refer to the appropriate corresponding section of the *Treatise*. But this is not nearly as convenient as Selby-Bigge's systematic discussion, and certainly there is nothing that quite compares to the neat table of correspondences that we find in Selby-Bigge's Introduction. However, there is equally in Selby-Bigge nothing that compares to the invaluable comparison in the scholarly version of Beauchamp's *Enquiry* of the changes in those passages of the *Enquiry* that are directly taken from the *Treatise*, re-worked in various ways. Those re-workings are clearly displayed in a way that is entirely pellucid and convenient.

The other loss is Selby-Bigge's Index. That Index is often enough frustrating. There are many little references that one would like to be able to find that are simply absent from this Index. These things are all thankfully present in Beauchamp's Indexes. Nonetheless, the Selby-Bigge Index has its admirable qualities. It gives a real sense for most of the arguments that one finds in the *Enquiry*. One does not find this in the Beauchamp Indexes. Another slightly frustrating aspect of the Beauchamp Indexes is the fact that they refer not simply to *Hume's Enquiry* but include references to all the material in the volume, including the editorial material.

Here is another complaint that I have as a teacher. In the student version, Beauchamp's short explications of the argument of each section are admirable, and will certainly prove extremely useful to the beginning student. But they do not provide an *argumentative* context for discussing Hume in the way that T. H. Green provided such a context for the *Treatise*. Green's Introduction is rather dated, but its idealist critique of Hume's philosophy makes an admirable foil for the teacher to refer to in his or her discussion, and for students to refer to in becoming clear on the philosophical structure of Hume's argument. Green's philosophical argument constantly illuminates the structure of Hume's argument, even where one judges the idealist case that Green is making is mistaken. Beauchamp's Introduction and summaries of the argument for each section do not provide this sort of philosophical argument; they remain much more expository, giving, in a very clear form, something of the sense of Hume but not providing the further illumination that comes from philosophical contrast with a different point of view.

There are of course favorite little pieces that one wishes Beauchamp had noted. Let me mention three. The first concerns the definitions of the concept of "cause" (*Enquiry*, sec. 7). Hume offers two definitions. As Beauchamp

points out, this has given rise to interpretative problems. But it would be helpful to place this in the context of Hume's account of relations (*Treatise* 1.1.5). On this account Hume distinguishes relations considered "naturally" and considered "philosophically." The point is that Hume is not giving in the ordinary sense two definitions of "cause." Rather, he is simply defining it once, but in the way required by his concept of *relation*.

The second of my proposed additional annotations concerns the famous passage at the end of the *Enquiry*:

When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.

This is a reference to the supposed burning of the library of Alexandria upon its capture by the Caliph Omar. When questioned about the library Omar is reported to have said (in Gibbon's words, *Decline*, chapter 51): "If these writings of the Greeks agree with the book of God, they are useless and need not be preserved: if they disagree, they are pernicious and ought to be destroyed." And so they were consigned to the fires that heated the baths of Alexandria. If the library still contained books at the time of Omar, then they were books of theology. Gibbon comments (chapter 51), that "if the ponderous mass of Arian and Monophysite controversy were indeed consumed in the public baths, a philosopher may allow, with a smile, that it was ultimately devoted to the welfare of mankind."

The reference by itself is important, it seems to me, but more important yet is the attitude that it indicates about books of theology. Hume is hardly distant from Gibbon; he, perhaps, is the philosopher who is smiling at Gibbon's judgment.

Beauchamp studiously avoids, it seems to me, the Humean attack on religion. He cannot avoid the essay on miracles or the essay on God's particular providence. But the overall attack is missed. Part of missing that point is missing the point about belief in the Port Royal miracle and Pascal. It would have been nice if the editor had explicitly drawn the attention of the student to the socially pernicious nature of Pascal's belief. It is not just that the *Enquiry* deals with abstract philosophical issues and beliefs. It is also a political argument that some of them—the beliefs of "divinity" and "school metaphysics"—do not satisfy the principle of utility nor fit in with the natural sympathetic tendencies of humankind.

It is the credulity and superstition of Pascal that creates the belief in miracles. The alleged miracles of Port Royal are mentioned in the essay on miracles. The connection should, I think, have been made, with a reference from the close of the Dialogue to second *Enquiry*. And both should be connected to Hume's judgement that religion is dangerous.

Gibbon knew whereof Hume was speaking: after all, he had described "the triumph of barbarism and religion" (*Decline*, chapter 71). "The theologian may indulge the pleasing task of describing Religion as she descended from Heaven, arrayed in her natural purity. A more melancholy duty is imposed on the historian. He must discover the inevitable mixture of error and corruption which she contracted in a long residence upon earth, among a weak and degenerate race of beings." Gibbon refers to Hume's essay on miracles and in particular to the discussion of the Port Royal miracle of the thorn and the pricking of Pascal's niece, comparing Hume to Voltaire, suggesting that the former is the better critic of religion than the latter. "Voltaire . . . strives to invalidate the fact, but Hume . . . with more skill and success, seizes the battery and turns the cannon against his enemies" (*Decline*, chapter 61). Hume would agree with Gibbon on the "melancholy duty" imposed upon the historian.

Hume had described the Puritans in much the same way that Gibbon described the early Christians. For them, enthusiasm produced self delusion which in turn produced the rationalisations that masked the knavery of self love.

This indeed seems the key to most of the celebrated characters of that age. Equally full of fraud and ardour, these pious patriots talked perpetually of seeking the Lord, yet still pursued their own purposes; and have left a memorable lesson to posterity, how delusive, that principle is that by which they were animated. (*History of England*, 6 vols. [Boston: Little, Brown, 1854], 5: 526)

It is primarily in ages of barbarism that one finds people accepting the claims of miracles, Hume argues in his essay. So does Gibbon. Who would disagree? Who could take seriously Augustine's catalogue of miracles of his own time, listed so tediously in his account of the *City of God* (Book 22, chapter 8)?

It is in the essay on Miracles that Hume makes his sustained attack on Christianity. The argument depends in the end upon the account of reason that Hume has earlier provided. Beauchamp rightly points out that Hume argues that reason—that is, pure reason—cannot provide a justification of any causal inference. The latter is a matter of custom rather than reason, that

is, pure reason. It does not follow that reason cannot provide reasons justifying one causal inference over another. It depends upon what one might reasonably refer to as *reason*. If reason is the capacity to grasp causes, then, if causation be a matter of regularity, as the first definition of ‘cause’ requires, then what other than custom could grasp those causes and what other than custom ought to be referred to as ‘reason’? That Hume re-defines the concept of *reason* to a more reasonable concept than that provided by the rationalists and the Aristotelians is something that Beauchamp does not clearly point out to the student. This is important because it allows us to characterise Hume as a philosopher who is more than a sceptic. He is a philosopher who does allow that inductive inferences are a matter of reason, and who does allow that some inductive inferences are more reasonable than others.

In the *Treatise* Hume provides a set of rules by which to judge of causes and effects. These rules define when it is reasonable to adopt towards a regularity (“cause” by definition one) the attitude mentioned in the second definition of “cause”. In the first *Enquiry* these rules are given in a rather different, and more diffuse, form in a long footnote in the section dealing with the “Reason of Animals” and just before the essay on “Miracles.” Hume clearly means for the reader to use these rules in his or her considerations concerning miracles. At least, that is what the reasonable person would do, use reasonable rules to provide reasoned judgments about the causes of unusual events.

These reflections lead to my final comment. This concerns what is in the bibliography. It is clearly not intended to be complete. But there is the fact that the notion of what is reasonable does play a central role in Hume’s philosophy. It was Páll Árdal who pointed this out in his essay on “Some Implications of the Virtue of Reasonableness in Hume’s *Treatise*.” (In *Hume: A Re-Evaluation*, ed. D. Livingston and J. King [New York: Fordham University Press, 1976.])

More generally, Beauchamp does not really provide for the reader of the *Enquiry*, the important sense in which Hume proposes a reason which is at once reasonable and at the same time critical of religion. Beauchamp ought to have brought out that Hume, no matter the surface, has religion, Christianity in particular, as the object of his criticism, and that the thrust of his criticism is that it is unreasonable. It is our secular ends of empirical enquiry that fit the utilitarian and sympathetic standards that are our truly human goals. These secular ends may not yield the certainty that the rationalists demanded, but that demand was unreasonable—it cannot be satisfied by our human capacities.

But here I am perhaps slipping from reviewing into philosophical argument. Let me conclude by emphasising that Beauchamp has done a marvellous job with both these versions of the first *Enquiry*. They surely and justifiably will become standard. We are all indebted to Beauchamp for his work. He has served Hume well.

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NOTES

1. David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). There are also new critical and student editions of the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, also by Beauchamp, which also promise to become standard.